

holocaust (LL holocaustum: a whole burnt offering) (holokauston
δαόκαυτος: burnt whole. ὀλοκαύτωμα: a whole burnt-offering)

A Paper Eichmann?

cf. ἑκατόμ-βη: an offering of a hundred oxen; commonly
a great public sacrifice

In memory of
Henri I. Marrou

PIERRE VIDAL-NAQUET

Philosopher Marcel Gauchet devoted his appearance in the first issue of the French journal *Le Débat* (May 1980) to what he called “inexistentialism.” For it is, in fact, a feature of present-day “culture” suddenly to declare inexistent supposedly firmly established social, political, conceptual, cultural, or biological realities. The result is that any number of things—sex, woman, domination, oppression, submission, history, reality, the individual, nature, the state, the proletariat, ideology, politics, madness, trees—are dismissed as “inexistent.” And Gauchet adds: “Philosophy, being an eminently predatory activity, is practiced only at the expense of the environment. For the thinker to prosper, the forest of his being must recede.” These little games are saddening; but they can also be entertaining, and they are not necessarily dangerous. The inexistence of sexuality and sexual relations in no way disturbs lovers, nor has the lack of existence of trees brought either woodcutters or manufacturers of wood pulp to a point of starvation. Occasionally, however, the games cease to be innocent. This is the case when, instead of such abstractions as woman, nature, or history, they concern a specific expression of humanity, a historical moment of human suffering.

In the long endeavor to define man, vis-à-vis the gods and the animal kingdom, the fraction of humanity to which we belong has chosen, at least since Homer and Hesiod in the eighth century B.C., to identify man, in contrast to animals, as the creature that does not eat its fellow creatures. In *Works and Days*, Hesiod wrote: “Such is the law that Zeus, the son of Cronos, prescribed for men: fish, wild animals, winged birds may devour one another, since there exists no justice among them.” There do exist transgressions of this law, rather rarely in practice, more frequently in mythological narration. Above all, there exist transgressors, notably certain barbarians who, by the very act of eating human flesh, exclude themselves from humanity. A Cyclops is not a man.

All societies do not draw the line precisely at this level. There are some that are neither more nor less “human” than Greek society, or than modern Western society, and which allow consumption of human flesh. There are, however, none, I believe, that consider this consumption to be an act just like any other; human meat does not fall into the same category as hunted meat, or the meat of farm-bred animals.

Anthropophagy, or cannibalism—as they say in Caribbean language by generalizing a word that means “bold”—has given rise in recent years to two reactions that are perfectly symmetrical and opposed. The first is the “materialist”

interpretation advanced by Marvin Harris,¹ which sets out to explain, in all modesty, "the origins of war, capitalism, the state, and male supremacy."² According to Harris, if human beings eat human flesh, they do so essentially because they must have proteins. Actually, this totalitarian explanation explains nothing. Under these conditions, how may we account for the fact that Aztec society enjoyed abundant food resources? Or that in 1521, when Cortés's men were attacking and starving the inhabitants of Mexico City, the latter sacrificed only their prisoners, and ate none but the ritually edible parts (the arms and legs), which did not keep them from dying of hunger? To quote Marshall Sahlins:

Clearly the cultural content at issue, this stupendous system of sacrifice, is too rich, logically as well as practically, to be explained by the natural need for protein by which Harris proposes to account for it. To accept his view, we have to make some kind of bargain with the ethnographic reality, trading away what we know about it in order to understand it. Or at the least, it takes a heroic act of utilitarian faith to conclude that this sacrificial system was a way the Aztecs had of getting some meat.

✓ Casting the problem of human sacrifice and anthropophagy in terms of economic rationality and profit creates incredible absurdities, for the system was in no way a profitable one and even arose out of and depended on an economy of waste.

But then how are we to explain cannibals, if they seek neither food nor profits? At this point, there intervenes another explanation that simply denies that cannibals exist: they are a myth.

Like many historians, I am interested in the history of what is imagined. I consider the imaginary to be an aspect of history, and that its history should be undertaken in the same way as the history of cereal production, or the marriage rate in nineteenth-century France. Nevertheless, of course, this particular reality is less "real" than what we are accustomed to call by that term. The Marquis de Sade's fantasms and the Reign of Terror are different in nature, even radically opposed: Sade was a rather gentle man. The popularization of psychoanalysis has played a role in this confusion of fantasy and reality. As a historian, I share responsibility for the aberrations I shall discuss.

¹ Marvin Harris, *Cannibals and Kings: The Origins of Cultures* (New York: Random House, 1978).

² From an excellent review of Harris's book by Marshall Sahlins: "Culture, Proteins, Profit," *New York Review of Books*, November 23, 1978. In addition to male supremacy, Harris undertakes to explain the Oedipus complex (*Cannibals and Kings*, pp. 57-66).

We are indebted for the following dazzling evidence to W. Arens, who states: there never were any cannibals.³ As is often the case with discoveries of this kind, Arens has passed through several stages, which he explains at length. Convinced that anthropophagy was a common practice, he was then surprised to note the imprecise nature of ethnographic literature on the subject. He therefore undertook a search for decisive proof: he advertised in an anthropological journal for an eye-witness account. The replies he received were vague; but finally a young German scholar, Erwin Frank, informed him that his examination of all the literature on cannibalism among the Amazon-basin Indians, dating from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries, has yielded not a single piece of firsthand evidence concerning the act of eating one's neighbor. Little by little, he had arrived at a conclusion that was both heartening and bitter: that there never have been any cannibals and that anthropophagy is an invention of anthropologists, based on inconsistent testimony. The function of this invention, he said, was to justify domination over defeated societies by conquering ones.

That this theory is quite absurd can be demonstrated in a few lines. We shall always, no doubt, lack the testimony of the victims—the only proof, probably, that could satisfy the requirements of Arens. But there exists a perfectly sufficient amount of testimony and information to leave no room for doubt, as Marshall Sahlins and others have reminded us. Sahlins also has the unusual merit of analyzing the logic that subtends this type of operation, which, he says, is the product not of research, but of what he calls the university prestige game. In conclusion, Sahlins has made the indispensable analogy with what, from now on, will be the essential subject of this article:

It all follows a familiar American pattern of social science journalism: Professor X puts out some outrageous theory, such as, *the Nazis didn't really kill the Jews*, human civilization comes from another planet, or there is no such thing as cannibalism. Since facts are plainly against him, X's main argument consists of the expression, in the highest moral tones, of his own disregard for all available evidence to the contrary. . . . All this provokes Y and Z to issue a rejoinder, such as this one. X now becomes "the controversial Professor X" and his book is respectfully reviewed by nonprofessionals in *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *The New Yorker*. There follow appearances on radio, TV, and in the columns of the daily newspapers.⁴

³ W. Arens, *The Man-eating Myth* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979). See letter from M. Sahlins, *New York Review of Books*, March 22, 1979, p. 47; also R. Needham, "Chewing on the Cannibals," *Times Literary Supplement*, London, January 1, 1980, and correspondence on this subject in the *TLS* that ended only in April 1980.

⁴ *New York Review of Books*, March 22, 1979, p. 47.

In other words, in this matter, there is no question of truth, no question of science, but simply of publicity for the university prestige game.

To put it differently, let's take a little-known figure in ancient history whose existence has posed no problems thus far, for instance the Athenian lawgiver Cleisthenes (end of the sixth century B.C.). One fine day, I decide that he did not exist, and I prove it: Herodotus was not in a position to know, and Aristotle quoted sources that themselves were hardly to be relied upon. But my real objective is something else: it is to create a schism between historians on my own terms. I will call all the historians that have preceded me "Cleisthenians," and I and my followers will be the "anti-Cleisthenians." Everybody will know that my theory is absurd, but since I shall have respected the rules of the game, my reputation will remain intact. Marshall Sahlins expresses in no uncertain terms what must be said about such behavior: "So the publishing decisions of academic presses, and ultimately the nature of scholarly research, are drawn irresistibly into the orbit of the average common opinions of the consumer public. It's a scandal."

The war had hardly ended when historical research on the concentration camps began: limited research for detail, general research to which some well-known names were signed—Gerald Reitlinger, Raul Hilberg, Léon Poliakov, Martin Broszat, Olga Wormser-Migot, and a few others. This was difficult work, because it implied a combined knowledge and experience. Michel de Bouard, a historian and former deportee, ended as follows his excellent historical outline of Mauthausen: "When there are no more survivors of deportation, then perhaps future archivists will obtain access to certain papers that today are still hidden; but they will lack the principal source, by which I mean the living memory of witnesses."⁵ Some important books have been written on deportation by deportees: David Rousset, Eugen Kogon, Germaine Tillion. (A book like Paul Rassinier's *Le Mensonge d'Ulysse*⁶ [published in English as *Debunking the Genocide Myth*] must be mentioned here: it is excellent as testimony of the author's own experiences and interesting when he criticizes other Buchenwald and Dora witnesses, throwing light on the responsibilities of the political apparatus, which was principally under the leadership of Communist deportees. However, it becomes frankly absurd and invidious when he discusses a subject concerning which he had no direct knowledge: the extermination camps, principally Auschwitz.) As it stands, this historical research has, if not a meaning, at least some meaning. It has its opaque passages as well as its

⁵ "Mauthausen," *Revue d'histoire de la deuxième guerre mondiale*, no. 15-16 (July-September 1954), pp. 41-80.

⁶ *Le Mensonge d'Ulysse*, 6th ed. (Paris: La Vieille Taupe, 1979). A complementary, greatly expanded volume, *Ulysse trahi par les siens*, appeared in 1980.

progressive logic:⁷ “euthanasia” of mental patients (partially by gas) in 1939–1941; extermination of Jews (men, women, and children) and Communist commissars in occupied Soviet Russia by *Einsatzgruppen*, in 1941–1942; organization, then rationalization of extermination by gas (first carbon monoxide, then Zyklon B) of Jews, Gypsies, and certain groups of Soviet prisoners, in specialized centers in Poland and then, for the most part, in Auschwitz; discontinuance of the policy of Jewish extermination on Himmler’s orders, end of October 1944, although certain extermination techniques continued to be used in Austrian, German, and Alsatian camps (there were small gas chambers in Mauthausen, Ravensbrück, and Struthof).⁸

Of course, like all historical accounts, this history needs criticism on several levels. It goes without saying that the oral evidence, together with the documents consulted—Faurisson notwithstanding,⁹ the Third Reich archives are accessible to researchers, whereas the French and Soviet archives are not—must be subjected to the critical methods that have stood the test of centuries. This means, of course, that nothing must be considered sacred. The figure of six million Jews exterminated, which originated in Nuremberg, has nothing sacred or definitive about it, and many historians arrive at a somewhat lower figure.¹⁰ Likewise, Serge Klarsfeld, with the scrupulous care that characterizes his *Mémorial*,¹¹ has reduced the figure usually mentioned in connection with the deportation of Jews from France (some 120,000) to about 76,000. There are few people who would not approve of this type of research, or not wish to

7 This was the point we sought to emphasize in the declaration initiated and written by Léon Poliakov and myself and signed by a great many French historians (*Le Monde*, February 21, 1979). Other articles, by F. Delpech (*ibid.*, March 8, 1979) and O. Wormser-Migot (*ibid.*, December 29, 1979), were similarly oriented.

8 There were gas chambers that were not used, notwithstanding the statements made by certain deportees and investigators. This was true of Dachau. I see no reason to cast doubt on the existence of those in Ravensbrück, Struthof, and Mauthausen; as regards this last camp, P. S. Choumoff’s demonstration, *Les chambres à gaz de Mauthausen* (Paris: Amicale des déportés de Mauthausen, 1978), convincingly refutes the brief note that O. Wormser-Migot wrote on this subject in his *Le Système concentrationnaire nazi* (Paris, 1968), pp. 541–44, and has also served to convince such historians as P. Renouvin and J.-B. Duroselle; on Ravensbrück, see Germaine Tillion, *Ravensbrück* (Paris: Seuil, 1973).

9 Serge Thion, et al., *Vérité historique ou vérité politique?* (Paris: La Vieille Taupe, 1980), p. 210 n. 45. Referred to hereafter as Thion.

10 Raul Hilberg’s figure came to 5,100,000 victims; see the recapitulation table in *The Destruction of the European Jews* (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1967), p. 767.

11 Serge Klarsfeld, *Le Mémorial de la déportation des juifs de France*, ed. B. and S. Klarsfeld (Paris, 1978); recently supplemented. This work is based essentially on German police sources, so that it needs, and will continue to need, a certain number of corrections. It does, however, constitute a good base from which to start.

see the number of investigations and reports increase.¹²

Finally, it is clear that this mass murder must be situated in the larger contexts of Hitlerian policy and the Second World War, the history of which cannot be written by the victors only. The Katyn massacre, the bombing of Dresden, the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the "return," under frightful conditions, of the Germans who had been driven out of Eastern Europe, the camps established near Perpignan by Third Republic authorities and the Vichy government, the handing over to the Soviets of Russian prisoners in the West—these are all part of the overall context, in the same way that Auschwitz and Treblinka are. But here again, comparisons must be plausible. Those who liken Hitler's camps to the camps organized for Americans of Japanese origin by the admittedly scandalous decision of the Roosevelt administration, are simply perpetrating a brazen lie (see Faurisson, in Thion, p. 189). The last general context is the planetary one of our contemporary massacre-ridden world (the Armenians in 1915, the countless colonial-war victims), in addition to vast populations that are exploited to the verge of bare survival (the Third World). Here again, we must make use of a sensible measure; for instance, the expulsions of the Palestinians cannot be compared with the Nazi deportations, and the massacre of Deir Yassin by members of the *Irgun* and the *Stern* groups (April 10, 1948), can be approximated with Oradour, but not with Auschwitz. Finally, it is the duty of historians to take historical facts out of the hands of ideologists who exploit them. In the case of the genocide of Jews, it is perfectly evident that one of the Jewish ideologies, Zionism, exploits this terrible massacre in a way that is at times quite scandalous. But that an ideology seizes upon a fact does not make this fact inexistent, as Thion's entire book tries to demonstrate, beginning with the title—*Vérité historique ou vérité politique*—which corresponds closely to his own personal actions rather than to the actions of those he attacks. To take one extreme example: does the fact that the Katyn massacre was made public by Hitler's propaganda make it any less a reality? Why shouldn't the LICRA (*Ligue internationale contre le racisme et l'antisémitisme*) be telling the truth about Auschwitz and, at the same time, employ the services of a racist clown like Paul Giniewski (Thion, pp. 152–53)? On the other hand, it is incredible that Faurisson's new supporter, Vincent Monteil, should be presented simply as a man "who has always said what he thought." Monteil is a rabid partisan, bordering on paranoia, of the most extreme Arab attitudes toward Israel and the Jews (Thion, pp. 130–31).

12 Faurisson has written that the findings of the Comité d'Histoire de la Seconde Guerre Mondiale are inaccessible (Thion, pp. 98, 115) with regard to the total number of nonracial deportees. This figure may be found quite readily in J.-P. Azéma, *De Munich à la Libération* (Paris: Seuil, 1979), p. 189: 63,000 deportees, among whom were 41,000 members of the Resistance. This estimate is lower than previously reported ones.

The work plan I have outlined belongs under the heading of historical research. It is not entirely completed and, like all historical research, it will never be finished.

✓ Does the so-called revisionist literature offer, even in an excessive form, a critical vision of this kind? It does not. This literature, for the most part, is not a history of the 1939–1945 war, but a reflection of contemporary mental attitudes, principally since the 1960s. (An incomplete bibliography of such work appears in Thion, p. 341.) One of the very rare pieces of information that may be gleaned from Thion's book, independently of his bibliography, is the demonstration made by Faurisson to prove that Ann Frank's diary, if not exactly a literary fraud, is nevertheless a doctored text (Thion, pp. 213–98). Even Thion clear-sightedly remarks (p. 56): "Of course, this in no way detracts from her [Ann Frank's] tragic fate." Measured on the scale of Hitler's genocide, this slight change is the equivalent of a comma.

In reality, the idea that we must oppose an "exterminationist" school to a "revisionist" school is an absurd one, and is naturally a creation of the self-designated revisionists. There are historical schools that confront one another when new problematics, new types of documents, new subjects appear. Examples of these confrontations are not lacking. But could we say that there exists one school to prove that the Bastille fell on July 14, 1789, and another that would insist it fell on July 15? Here we are on the terrain of positive history, *wie es ist eigentlich gewesen*, how things actually were, according to the nineteenth-century formula of Leopold Ranke. This is a terrain on which true opposes false quite simply, independent of any kind of interpretation.

There are, to be sure, historical schools that call themselves "revisionist." To take the opposite view of what is taught is a rather perverse habit of many of our contemporaries, even if it arises out of a potentially salutary reflex. Someone will explain, for instance, that Stalin wielded little or no power in the late thirties, or that the American government alone was responsible for the cold war (e.g., Joyce and Gabriel Kolko), which is all the more easily demonstrable since U.S. government archives are available for research and Soviet archives are not. The works in question are debatable, but they nevertheless derive from a scholarly ethic and practice. There is nothing of the kind in the work of the revisionists of the Hitler genocide, where it is simply a matter of replacing an unbearable truth with a reassuring lie.

If we may believe appearances, there exists more than one room in the dwelling place of the revisionists, among whom Serge Thion represents a moderate, even antifascist variety. His commitment is limited to eliminating from the catalogue of Hitler's crimes those which, according to any sane criticism, can only be considered impossible.

Can
Nevitt

Suppose we reduce the question to its key elements: to remove a major crime from the record of Nazi ignominy would amount either to rehabilitation of the Third Reich, or to distorting it, thus making it comparable to other political regimes. This is a kind of "guilt through association" that assumes that writers who express doubt concerning the existence of the gas chambers intend as well to question all the other much better known and attested horrors. It is merely a polemical method. [Thion, p. 39]

Actually, there is here neither guilt through association nor polemical method. And Faurisson spoke from the heart of revisionist truth when he made the notorious statement that "Hitler never ordered or allowed anybody to be put to death for reasons of race or religion" (Thion, p. 91). It is a fact that the "revisionists" all share, more or less, a few extremely simple premises:

1. There was no genocide, and the instruments that symbolize it, the gas chambers, never existed.¹³
2. The "final solution" for Jews in the West was no more than expulsion of Jews to Eastern Europe, a "remand," as Faurisson put it (Thion, p. 90). Since the majority of French Jews came from the East, we may conclude that this measure was the equivalent of repatriation, rather like when the French government "repatriated" Algerians, in October 1961, to their "native villages."
3. The figure cited for Jewish victims of Nazism is much lower than has been stated. "There does not exist a single document worthy of the name that places the total losses of the Jewish population during the last war at more than 200,000 It should be mentioned, too, that Jews who died a natural death are included in this figure," calmly wrote German lawyer Manfred Roeder¹⁴—which would indicate that, demographically, the death rate in the Jewish communities was unusually low. Others generously push the figure as high as one million (Rassinier, Butz) by attributing a large number of deaths to Allied raids. Faurisson, on the other hand, divides this million in two, or thereabouts: a few hundred thousand were killed in uniform (a testimonial to their bravery?) and as many others as a result of military action (Thion, p. 197). As for those who died in Auschwitz, both Jews and non-Jews, the figure "mounted to about 50,000" (ibid.).
4. Hitler's Germany was not primarily responsible for the Second World War. Either it shares this responsibility with the Jews or it was not responsible at all (Faurisson, in Thion, p. 187).

¹³ However, in *Le mensonge d'Ulysse* (pp. 170–71), Rassinier admits the probable existence of a few gas chambers, due perhaps to "one or two crazy SS men" and to "one or two concentration camp administrations that wanted to humor them," or vice versa.

¹⁴ M. Roeder, preface to Thiess Christophersen, *Le Mensonge d'Auschwitz* (Paris: FANE, 1973), p. 8. FANE, a French Nazi group, was officially disbanded in September 1980.

5. The principal enemy of the human species during the 1930s and 1940s was not Nazi Germany but Stalin's Soviet Russia.

6. The genocide theory is an invention of Allied, principally Jewish, and more especially Zionist, propaganda, which may be easily explained by the Jewish propensity, under the influence of the Talmud, to juggle imaginary figures.¹⁵

Anybody who cares to consult the evidence will see for himself that I am not inventing. Furthermore, these revisionist gentlemen organized a convention in Los Angeles, in September 1979, on the occasion of which they offered a prize of \$50,000 to anyone who could produce proof of a gas chamber designed for exterminating Jews.¹⁶ It is to be supposed that they themselves would constitute the jury. They now have their own news organ, *The Journal of Historical Review*, the first issue of which (Spring 1980) contains contributions by some of the ideological leaders of the movement, including Arthur Butz and Robert Faurisson. It also contains an account of the Los Angeles convention.

Here, for instance, are some of the premises selected for analysis by Dr. Austin J. App, an American of German origin, who has taught in a number of colleges, both Catholic and nondenominational: "The Third Reich wanted to get Jews to emigrate," he writes,

not to liquidate them physically. Had they intended extermination, 500,000 concentration camp survivors [an invented figure] would not now be in Israel to collect fancy indemnities from West Germany. . . . Absolutely no Jews were "gassed" in any concentration camps. There were crematoria for cremating corpses who had died from whatever cause, including especially also the victims of the genocidal Anglo-American air raids. The majority of Jews who died in pogroms, and those who disappeared and are still unaccounted for, fell a foul in territories controlled by the Soviet Russians, not in territories while under German control. . . . Most of the Jews alleged to have met their death at the hand of Germans were subversives, partisans, spies and criminals, and also often victims of unfortunate but internationally legal reprisals.¹⁷

It is not hard to recognize the different components of this ideological creed: German nationalism, neo-Nazism, anti-communism, anti-Zionism, anti-Semi-

¹⁵ Arthur R. Butz, *The Hoax of the Twentieth Century*, 4th ed. (Torrance, Calif.: Noontide Press, 1979), pp. 245-48; it goes without saying that if the Talmud contains imaginary figures, the same is true of all ancient literature.

¹⁶ See *Spotlight*, September 24, 1979, and regarding this convention, N. Fresco, "Les Redresseurs de morts," *Les Temps Modernes*, June 1980.

¹⁷ *Journal of Historical Review*, no. 1, p. 57.

tism. The ingredients reappear in various forms and proportions, according to the different authors (it is obvious, for instance, that German nationalism plays no direct role in the work of the French pacifist Paul Rassinier). But the part played by anti-Semitism, as also by pathological hatred of Jews, is enormous. The aim of the operation is quite clear: it is ideologically to deprive a community of what is represented by its historic memory. Because, finally, it is we who must *prove* what happened to us. We who *know*, since 1945, are now expected to demonstrate, to be eloquent, to use the weapons of rhetoric, to enter into the world of what the Greeks called the *Peithô* ("persuasion"), of which they had made a goddess. Do people actually realize what this means?

The principles of the revisionist method may, in fact, be summarized as follows:

1. Any direct testimony furnished by Jews is a lie and an invention.
2. All testimony, as well as all documents dating from before the Liberation, are considered to be falsified and are dismissed or labeled as "rumors." Butz and Rassinier ignore entirely, for instance, the written records of members of the Auschwitz *Sonderkommando*, which were hidden by them and discovered after the war. These documents give a precise description that corresponds to all that we know from other sources concerning the functioning of the gas chambers.¹⁸ Faurisson is content to belittle the "miraculously discovered manuscripts" (*Le Monde*, January 1, 1979, and Thion, p. 110), which he does not even attempt to show are not authentic.
3. In general, any document that gives firsthand evidence of Nazi methods is branded as either false or tampered with. Example: Faurisson classifies with one word, along with other evidence labeled "untrue, apocryphal, or suspect" (Thion, p. 284), the heroic "chronicle" that accompanied the Warsaw ghetto archives kept by Emmanuel Ringelblum and a working group, one of whose members I know personally. In response to inquiry, I learned that the chronicle had, in fact, been expurgated, especially in the Polish version (Warsaw, 1952), from which certain passages hardly flattering to Polish national pride¹⁹ had been deleted. These deletions, however, in no way alter the value of the document as regards Nazi policy.
4. Any Nazi document is accepted at face value if it is written in coded, unfamiliar language, but is ignored (or "underinterpreted") if written in plain lan-

¹⁸ These four essential documents have been collected and published in German translation (one of the originals is in French, the others in Yiddish) in the *Hefte von Auschwitz*, a publication of the Oswiecim Museum *Sonderheft* no. 1 (1972); an English translation has been published by the museum, edited by J. Bezwinska and D. Czech, under the title: "Amidst a Nightmare of Crime: Notes of Prisoners of the *Sonderkommando*," 1973.

¹⁹ See the minutely executed account by J. Kermish, "Mutilated Version of Ringelblum's Notes," *Yivo Annual of Jewish Social Science*, no. 8 (1953), pp. 289-301.

guage, as in the case of certain speeches by Himmler, of which the following, dated December 16, 1943, is an example: "Whenever, in order to capture a village, I have been obliged to order the pursuit of Jewish partisans and commissars—what I am saying here is intended for this audience alone—I have systematically given orders to the effect that the wives and children of these partisans and commissars should also be killed."²⁰ Or this, which figures in Goebbels's diary for May 13, 1943: "There is therefore no other solution for modern nations except to exterminate the Jew."²¹ On the other hand, all manifestations of war racism in the Allied camp (and there were plenty, as may be imagined) are highlighted.

5. All postwar evidence from Nazis, whether it resulted from legal action in the East or in the West, in Warsaw or in Cologne, in Jerusalem or in Nuremberg, in 1945 or in 1963, is considered to have been obtained by means of torture or intimidation. I shall return to this important point, but let me say right away that, under these circumstances, it is rather strange that not one SS leader should have denied the existence of the gas chambers. More precisely, Paul Rassinier "believes he knew" (*Ulysse trahi*, p. 132) that the last Auschwitz commander, Richard Baer, declared "there had never been any gas chambers in Auschwitz under his administration"; but, providentially, Baer died in prison in 1963.

6. An entire arsenal of pseudotechnical explanations is used to demonstrate the material impossibility of mass gassing. But Faurisson's reflections on the gas chambers used in certain American states for execution of prisoners sentenced to die, and the precautions surrounding this usage (Thion, pp. 301-09), in no way prove that mass gassing is impossible to achieve; they amount to comparisons of things that are not comparable, as remote from each other as the voracity of a starving man from the fastidiousness of a diner at Maxim's. The operation of gassing, like that of feeding oneself, can take place in totally different situations.

7. People used to prove the existence of God by the fact that existence was inherent in the concept of God—the well-known ontological proof. One might say that for the "revisionists," the gas chambers do not exist since inexistence is one of their attributes; that is a "non-ontological" proof. For instance, the word *Vergasung* means gassing when used negatively in a letter from historian Martin Broszat in *Der Zeit* (August 19, 1960): "*Keine Vergasung in Dachau* [No gassing in Dachau]". But *Vergassungskeller* means "carburization chamber" in a January 1948 document cited by Georges Wellers (Faurisson, in Thion, pp. 104, 109).

²⁰ *Himmler's Geheimreden, 1933 bis 1945, und andere Ansprachen* (Frankfurt, Berlin, Vienna: Propyläen Verlag, 1974), p. 201.

²¹ Louis P. Lochner, *The Goebbels Diaries 1942-1943* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1948). See entry for May 13, 1943, p. 377.

8. Finally, and above all, whatever can give meaning to this dreadful history, trace its evolution or furnish terms of political comparison, is either ignored or dismissed as spurious. There is not a line signed by Faurisson and Thion that recalls the feats of the *Einsatzgruppen* (as, for instance, in the famous ravine of Babi Yar); not a line by either of them to remind us that German mental patients were exterminated between 1939 and 1941, and that certain of those who carried out this operation were later to exercise their talents on the Jews (for example, a certain F. Stangl in Treblinka).²² Is that episode the invention of an international organization of mental patients? As for Butz, he is content to state that euthanasia of mental patients has nothing in common with the pseudo-extermination of Jews (*The Hoax*, pp. 174-75). There are only a few lines in *The Hoax* (pp. 124, 130, 220) in which Butz mentions the presence of Gypsies in Auschwitz, and he does not even try to demolish what is generally reported about their extermination. As for Faurisson, he says only that the Gypsies were interned, "not for racist reasons, but for reasons of nomadism," adding that large numbers of Gypsy children were born in Auschwitz, but with no mention of what became of them (they were exterminated). He points out that in France it was the Resistance who did away with the Gypsies (Thion, pp. 192, 212 n. 53).

✓ We have perhaps a clearer view now of what this historical method means: in our spectacle- and image-fed society, this attempt at extermination on paper provides a substitute for actual extermination. The dead are resurrected in order more easily to hit the live targets. Eichmann traveled all over Nazi Europe organizing his train traffic. Robert Faurisson disposes of no trains, but he has papers galore. Pierre Guillaume describes him as "a man who is thoroughly familiar with his subject (he possesses 200 kilograms of working documents, representing analysis of several tons of evidence)" (Thion, p. 139). The worst of it is that the description is accurate: Robert Faurisson has actually spent an incalculable number of working days examining French and German archives, though in search not, as he asserts, of the truth,²³ but of what is untrue, for a means by which to destroy an immense mass of indestructible evidence—indestructible precisely because it constitutes a whole, not a sheaf of dubious documents, as the revisionists would like people to believe.

²² Regarding this dossier, see L. Poliakov, *Bréviaire de la haine* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1979), pp. 209-18. Published in English as *Harvest of Hate* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1954); reprinted (New York: Holocaust Library, 1979), pp. 183-88. On Stangl and several others, see Gitta Sereny, *Into that Darkness* (London: Deutsch, 1974).

²³ "I have analyzed thousands of documents. . . . I have tirelessly pursued specialists and historians with my questions. I have tried in vain to find a single former deportee capable of proving to me that he had really seen, with his own eyes, a gas chamber." *Le Monde*, January 16, 1979, and Thion, p. 61.

Although there is not, in the scientific sense, any debate as regards the existence of the gas chambers, it is a fact that for these revisionist gentlemen, such a debate does exist, or rather, it doesn't exist, since they are convinced—except with regard to the activities of “one or two crazy SS men”—that no such thing ever existed. But a gas chamber doesn't exist by and for itself; it exists as the terminal stage of a *selection* process that, at the entrance to the camp, or inside the camp, made a summary separation between the men and women the SS doctors considered fit for work, and the others. The scene has been described countless times, almost identically, by all the witnesses,²⁴ which, unhappily, does not mean that they copied one another. The testimony of the young Italian, Primo Levi, a chemist, is particularly stark. In a train carrying 650 deportees, he left northern Italy February 22, 1944. On the train's arrival in Auschwitz, Levi notes, some ten SS men

interrogated the passengers with an air of indifference. “Age?” “In good health?” “Sick?”—each time pointing in one of two directions. In less than ten minutes, we able-bodied men were grouped together. What happened to the others, the women, children, and old people, we couldn't find out then, nor did we afterward; they were simply swallowed up in the darkness.

Sometimes, adds Primo Levi, who was quick to learn, matters were handled even more simply: those who left the train on one side of the tracks were registered, “while the others went directly to the gas chambers.”²⁵ That was how SS rationality functioned. Auschwitz, as we have been told countless times in every key (Butz, Faurisson, Thion), was a large industrial center that specialized in the production of synthetic rubber. But no one has ever explained why babies had to be brought there, nor has anyone ever told us what became of those babies. The total inability of the revisionists to say where the people not registered in the camp were sent—people whose names nevertheless figured on the convoy lists—is proof of the mendacious nature of their affirmations.²⁶ And yet it was not for failure to try. Thiess Christophersen, who was the favorite witness of the revisionists, writes quite plainly:

24 Whatever Thion may say (pp. 34–35), it would appear that a photograph taken August 25, 1944, and recently published by the CIA, shows the procedure taking place. Dino A. Brugioni and Robert G. Poirier, *The Holocaust Revisited* (Washington, D.C., 1979).

25 Primo Levi, *Se questo è un uomo* (Turin: Einaudi, 1965), pp. 13–20. Among numerous other accounts, see also Marc Klein, in the collection *De l'Université aux camps de concentration, témoignages strasbourgeois*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Belles Lettres, 1954), pp. 420–21.

26 Pierre Guillaume, in answer to my question on the subject, replied that these people were transferred to the Kielce railway station. Why?

When the prisoners were asked at roll call whether they were willing to do this work [setting out seedlings of a species of dandelion used in rubber manufacture], or whether they had done similar work, there were nearly always too many volunteers. So they would make a selection. Later, however, this selection process was completely distorted. It was natural to want to keep the prisoners occupied, and they themselves asked nothing better. The only purpose of selection was to make use of the prisoners according to their tastes, their capacities, and the state of their health.

Here, too, the otherwise dextrous Arthur Butz would appear to have slipped up, his account stating merely that "extensive industrial and other activities required selection of people for various conventional purposes" (*The Hoax*, p. 111). His unique argument against the usual interpretations is that there were some very ill Jews in the hospital. This is yet another attempt to invent a largely imaginary rationality.

The essential point is to know what happened during the selection made as one entered the camp or later, during the operations that, according to current interpretation, were intended to separate those who were still able to work from those who were not (and who were therefore directed toward the extermination services). Would it have been possible for someone included in this latter selection to reappear at a later time? When Rassinier was in Dora, he had a friend who was selected and who reappeared. But there were no gas chambers at Dora and the men had been sent to Bergen-Belsen, a hospital camp—actually, a place to die in—from which he had the luck to return (*Mensonge*, p. 170). Faurisson has triumphantly published a photograph of Simone Veil, the current president of the European Parliament, who, although she was reported to have been gassed, is alive and well. The mechanism of this mistake is extremely simple, and the information that Faurisson gives (Thion, p. 328), makes it easy to understand. According to the Polish historian Danuta Czech, the original camp calendar for April 1944 establishes the fact that convoy number 71, which came from Drancy, near Paris, on April 16 was handled in the following manner: 165 men were registered, and the rest of the convoy were gassed (*Hefte von Auschwitz* no. 7 [1964], p. 88). The camp archives, which were incomplete, no longer included the names of women who had been registered. This mistake was corrected by Serge Klarsfeld, in his *Mémorial*: "The Auschwitz calendar gives no names of women who were selected, but this is misleading, since 70 women survivors of this convoy were counted in 1945. There were also 35 male survivors."

The idea of selection can, however, be put to good use, as, for instance, in a law court. Just as for an optimist a glass is half full, and for a pessimist it is half empty, one can also choose to see only the "positive" aspect, if such a word can be used, of selection. This was the choice made by Hans Laternser, who was

counsel for the defense during the trial of the German High Command at Nuremberg, and who again in 1963–1965 defended several of the men under indictment in the Frankfurt Auschwitz trial. Since it was evident, he explained, that Hitler and Himmler's aim had been to annihilate the Jews, anyone who practiced a selection that allowed them to enter the camp was placing an obstacle in the way of the "final solution."²⁷

This was not, as may be imagined, Robert Faurisson's interpretation. He was led, however, spontaneously at first, then under constraint of Georges Wellers's decisive objections, to consider another aspect of selection, the separation of typhus victims from persons in good health—this being his interpretation of "special actions" as opposed to selections.²⁸ The conclusive reference on this question is a document whose authenticity has never been challenged (even Butz, courageous but not reckless, maintains complete silence on the subject). From August 30 to November 18, 1942, Professor Dr. Johann Paul Kremer occupied the post of SS doctor in the Auschwitz camp. In August 1945, he was arrested by the English, who seized a diary in which, since 1940, he had recorded different events of his life, including the "special actions" in which he had taken part in Auschwitz. This diary has been published.²⁹

In order to interpret its contents, I shall make an exception and adopt an exegetical rule laid down by Robert Faurisson himself—one to which, within a literary context, he has given several formulations. An early version of this rule: "One would need serious, as yet undiscovered reasons not to look for a meaning, one single meaning, in what we read, whether prose or poetry, in good literature or bad."³⁰ Then, more concisely: "We should look for the letter before we look for the spirit. Writing has only one meaning, or else it has no meaning at all" (*Nouvelles Littéraires*, February 10–17, 1977; Thion, p. 54). Applied to poetry, of which Faurisson is an interpreter by profession, this principle is patently absurd: poetry is always the interplay of multiple meanings. The rule is of value, however, when it is a matter of plain language, such as: I am going to buy a loaf of bread.

Kremer's diary unquestionably belongs in this latter category. The entries give us information about both the personal and the professional life of the

27 Hans Laternser, *Die andere Seite im Auschwitz-Prozess 1963–1965: Reden eines Verteidigers* (Stuttgart: Seewald, 1966), pp. 185–86.

28 The documents that compose the dossier, including the articles published in *Le Monde* on December 29, 1978, January 16, 1979, and February 21, 1979, may be found in Thion, pp. 63, 106, 109–10, 112, 332–34.

29 The German version is published in *Hefte von Auschwitz* no. 13 (1971), pp. 5–117, with an introduction and notes by J. Rawicz; English translation in *KL Auschwitz Seen by the SS*, ed. Jadwiga Bezwinska and Danuta Czech (Oswiecim Museum, 1972), pp. 199–281.

30 R. Faurisson, "A-t-on lu Rimbaud?" followed by "L'Affaire Rimbaud," *La Bibliothèque volante*, July 1971, p. 4.

doctor. For example, October 9, 1942: "Parcel with 9 pounds soft soap, value 200 marks, sent to Münster. Rainy weather"; September 21, 1942: "Wrote to the Cologne Chief of Police about Otto (criminal service department). Duck giblets for supper. Dr. Meyer told me about the inheritability of a traumatism (nose) in his father-in-law's family." Many of the remarks concern camp life, the various sicknesses that prevail there, and the preventive measures that are taken. For instance, on September 1, two days after the doctor's arrival: "Have ordered SS cap, belt, and suspenders from Berlin by mail. In the afternoon, was present at the gassing of a block with Zyklon B against lice." From the day he arrived, Kremer was struck by the prevalence of exanthematous typhus: he was vaccinated the following day, and revaccinated on September 7 and 14. His tone remains unchanged when he tells of taking a sample of "material" for laboratory experiments on prisoners, e.g., on October 3: "Today I preserved nearly live material from a human liver, spleen, and pancreas, as well as lice from typhus patients." Nor does it change when he witnesses physical punishment or executions. On September 9 he wrote: "Later, as camp doctor, was present at flogging of 8 camp inmates and at one execution by shooting with small-caliber gun." His calm is still unruffled on October 13 and 17, although the executions have become much more numerous: seven Polish civilians in the first case, eleven other victims in the second: "Was present at a punishment and eleven executions" ("*bei einem Straffvolzug und 11 Exekutionen zugegen*").

The tone changes in only one series of circumstances, when at times (not always) it rises to a remarkable emotional pitch. In this case, Kremer witnesses what the entry refers to as "special actions," *Sonderaktionen*. He attends eleven of these operations, which he numbers, and which take place sometimes twice a day. In seven cases, September 5 (second action), September 6 and 10, September 23 (two actions), September 30, and October 7, the tone remains normal. In the four other cases, however, which include the first and last actions of the series—proving that Kremer did not quite succeed in becoming inured—he gives signs of violent emotion, even of a certain terror. September 2: "Was present for the first time at special action (out-of-doors) at 3 A.M. In comparison with it, Dante's Inferno seems almost a comedy. It's not for nothing that Auschwitz is called an 'extermination camp' [*Umsonst wird Auschwitz nicht das Lager der Vernichtung genannt*]."³¹ September 5 (second action): "This noon was present at a special action ordered by the FKL³² (muslims); sheer horror. The *Haupt-scharführer* Thilo was right when he said to me today that here we are at the *anus mundi*." On October 12, after noting that as a result of an antityphus vaccination he has a fever, Kremer adds: "In spite of it, was present at night at another

31 Here, as elsewhere, in order to remain closer to the original, I have made some very minor corrections in the Polish publisher's translation.

32 *Frauenkonzentrationslager* ("concentration camp for women"): in other words, Birkenau. The context shows that these "muslims" are women.

special action with arrival from Holland (1,600 persons). Horrible scenes in front of the last bunker! It was my tenth special action." October 18: "In cold, wet weather, on this Sunday morning, was present at the eleventh special action (from Holland). Terrible scenes when three women begged to have their lives spared."

This coincidence between code language ("special action") and emotional language is certainly striking. But a second observation must also be made: in five cases out of eleven, Kremer gives a few precise details about the persons affected by the "special actions." In three cases, numbers two, ten, and eleven, the persons are Dutch. In the two others (one and nine) respectively, they are "muslims," "muslim women," and persons from abroad ("*Auswärtige*"). Before abandoning the wretched level of Kremer's own account, I recall that, in camp jargon, "muslims" were prisoners who had reached the final stage of general debilitation. But is that perhaps in too marked contradiction of witness Thies Christophersen?

The usual interpretation of these entries is that "special action" is a euphemism for "selection"—selection of arrivals from abroad, selection also of exhausted prisoners. In both cases, once they had been oriented in the "wrong" direction, they were on their way to the gas chambers.

Faurisson disputes this interpretation.³³ He proposes instead the following, which I quote in its entirety:

Doctor Johann Paul Kremer's diary must be cited correctly. If this is done, it will be seen that, although he speaks of the horrors of Auschwitz, this is an allusion to the horrors of the typhus epidemic of September–October 1942. On October 3, he wrote: "In Auschwitz, entire streets annihilated by typhus!" He himself came down with what he called the "Auschwitz sickness"; Germans too died of it. Sorting the sick from the well was "selection" or one form of "special action" mentioned by the doctor. This sorting took place either inside or outside the buildings. Dr. Kremer never wrote that Auschwitz was a *Vernichtungslager*, that is to say, according to the terminology invented by the Allies after the war, an "extermination camp" (to be understood as a camp equipped with a gas chamber). In reality he wrote: "It is not for nothing that Auschwitz is called the annihilation camp" (*das Lager der Vernichtung*). In the etymological sense of this word, typhus annihilates those whom it strikes. Another serious error of quotation is the following; on September 2, 1942, Kremer's manuscript reads: "This morning at 3 A.M., I was present out-of-doors, for the first time,

33 "The crudely related accounts of 'special actions' mentioned in the diary seized on the Auschwitz surgeon, contain nothing that would justify calling them gassings" (Thion, p. 63).

at a special action." Historians and judges traditionally delete the word "out-of-doors" (*draussen*) in order to make Kremer say that this action took place in a gas chamber. Finally, the frightful scenes before the "last bunker" (meaning in front of bunker Number 11) concern executions of prisoners under death sentence, at which the doctor was obliged to be present. Among those under sentence, there were three women who had arrived in a convoy from Holland. [Thion, pp. 109-10]

Georges Wellers has pointed out that Faurisson used Kremer's 1947 confessions to interpret them as though the diary entry dated October 18, 1942, referred to only three executions; but he pretended to be unaware that on the same day, in 1947, Kremer spoke of the gas chambers at Auschwitz (*Le Monde*, February 21, 1979; Thion, pp. 332-34). To this Faurisson came back with the rejoinder that he believed what was believable, not what was unbelievable. Kremer's statement one day that the gas chambers were reopened "a moment" after the victims had died was, Faurisson noted gravely, "a flagrant, material impossibility" (Thion, p. 112).

But let's leave aside, in this interpretation, everything that is simply a matter of ill-temper or subjectivity (what, exactly, is a "moment"?). The interpretation also conflicts with a series of absolutely determinant objections:

1. There is not a single passage in Kremer's diary in which he speaks of typhus in connection with "special actions."
2. It would be hard to understand why typhus should necessarily coincide with the arrivals from abroad (was there at that same date a typhus epidemic in Holland?).
3. It is also hard to understand why an execution, which was a commonplace sight for Kremer—as well, in fact, as everything concerning typhus—should all at once, with regard to a special action, assume such a tragic aspect.
4. Auschwitz is the *Lager der Vernichtung*, but Faurisson, who is so concerned about precision in matters of translation, did not notice that, in speaking about typhus, Kremer does not use the verb *vernichten* ("to exterminate"), but on October 3, wrote: "*In Auschwitz liegen ganze Strassenzüge an Typhus darnieder.*" The difference between the verbs *darniederliegen* and *vernichten* is significant, and Faurisson let himself be taken in by the Polish publisher's translation. Finally, a detail that I mention to show how Faurisson reads what is written: it is not true that Kremer had typhus, or that what he calls the "Auschwitz sickness" was typhus (37.8 on September 14). Actually, Kremer had been vaccinated against two forms of typhus: exanthematous and abdominal. Faurisson's interpretation is therefore not acceptable; and with it, the explanation of the Auschwitz mortality rate as being due to typhus is also invalidated. This latter

explanation is preferred by those among the revisionists who, like Butz, are willing to admit that lots of people died in Auschwitz. But we must return to what we learn from the camp archives and from Kremer's admissions: namely, that Kremer's "special actions" corresponded to convoys of deportees, who were, generally speaking, duly registered in the camp archives; that the nonregistered deportees in the camp were gassed in the Birkenau bunkers (small houses in the forest);³⁴ that camp patients, especially those with typhus, and "muslims" of both sexes, were also gassed; and that at times there occurred, at the last moment, painful scenes such as took place on October 18, 1942, with the three "young, healthy" Dutch women who "refused to enter the gas chamber and wept, begging that their lives be spared," and who were shot,³⁵ scenes that disturbed orderly routine among the SS.

When Kremer speaks of *Lager der Vernichtung*, it is true that he is not referring to a legal-administrative concept that, after all, did not figure among the official directives of the Third Reich; he was merely speaking of what he saw. In Faurisson's own chosen domain, that of philological exactness and translation, his interpretation is a misconstrual; in the domain of intellectual morality, and scientific integrity, it is a fake.

Arthur Butz describes historians who have tried to reconstruct the progression of the genocidal process as "mythologists of extermination" (*The Hoax*, p. 248 and passim). With this expression, clearly, he has given a perfect definition of what he himself and his fellow revisionists have achieved—a language that substitutes fiction for reality. For instance, to reject on principle all direct evidence, and accept instead as decisive proof the testimony of persons who, by their own admission, saw nothing at all—as in the case of the International Red Cross—is an unmistakable indication.³⁶ The replacing of history by

34 This practice did not in the least exclude other forms of murder, especially by phenol injections. Regarding the undoubtedly considerable importance of typhus in the Auschwitz mortality figures, see A. Fiderkiewicz, "Flecktyphus und Entlausung in Männerlager Birkenau," in *Erinnerungen Auschwitz Häftlinge* (Oswiecim Museum, n.d.), pp. 105–22.

35 Affidavit of Kremer's interrogation on July 30, 1947, in Krakow; in German: *Hefte von Auschwitz* no. 13 (1971), p. 113 n. 69. English translation in *KL Auschwitz Seen by the SS*, p. 226 n. 85.

36 See Butz, *The Hoax*, pp. 133–45 and passim; Faurisson in Thion, p. 105. On the visit of the International Red Cross delegates to the Auschwitz commandant in September 1944 see *Documents sur l'activité du CICR [International Red Cross] en faveur des civils détenus dans les camps de concentration en Allemagne (1939–1945)*, 3rd ed. (Geneva, April 1947). Shortly after this visit took place, it was learned that a British "trustee" from the Teschen camp tried to obtain information through third persons on what was said about the gas-chamber shower rooms. He did not succeed, while the delegates do not appear to have asked any direct questions—which may explain their conclusion: "We have the impression that the mystery remains well kept."

myth would present little or no danger if there were some absolute criterion for distinguishing one from the other at sight; a characteristic of the lie being, of course, that it purports to be the truth. This truth need not always be universally true. It can be the truth of a tiny sect, a truth to be disseminated with caution. This is the case of the publishers who brought out the "testimony" of Thiess Christophersen, who must not have had many illusions with regard to the credibility of their witness, since they introduce him with this quote from Theodor Storm: "Never hide the truth. Though it may make you suffer, it will never make you remorseful; but because truth is a pearl, it should never be cast before swine."³⁷ There are some equally deceptive, if more elaborate, "truths", and if a prize were to be given for lying, I should say that *The Hoax of the Twentieth Century* represents at times a rather frightening success in this genre: the reader is taken by the hand and led persuasively to the idea that Auschwitz is a mistaken rumor, out of which clever propagandists have gradually concocted a truth. This is the "gospel" of which Faurisson has undertaken to be the inept evangelist. It is Butz, however, who could be described, in the words of Zola, as the "diabolical artisan of judicial error." Refute Butz? Of course this is possible; it is even easy, if one is familiar with the record, but it would also be long and tedious. With a few specific examples we have seen that to break down an argument, both space and time are needed. When a fictitious account is properly presented, it does not, as such, contain the means with which to discredit it.

This is an old story that can be traced as far back as ancient Greece, when poets knew that they could speak both truth and untruth, that by virtue of resemblance, they could blend one with the other. Here is how the Muses, "the faithful daughters of the great Zeus," spoke to Hesiod: "We know how to tell lies that are exactly like realities; but when we want to do so, we also know how to proclaim truths" (*Theogony* 27.29). This proximity, this disturbing resemblance, was opposed by early philosophy, which set truth against appearance. History, too, joined in the discussion. Whereas in Israel it appears as the expression of human ambiguity,³⁸ in Greece it revolves around the opposition between true and false. "I am writing," said the first historian, Hecataeus of Miletus, "what I believe to be true, because it seems to me that the words spoken by the Greeks are profuse and ridiculous." But from Hecataeus to Herodotus, and from Herodotus to Thucydides, each generation of historians tried to disqualify the preceding one, since truth can disqualify what is mythic and untrue. With Plato, philosophy entered the fray and decisively advanced the cause of truth. For although Plato retained from Parmenides the opposition of appearance to truth, his own expressed tenets dealt first and foremost with the world of men

37 Regarding the alarm expressed by lawyer Manfred Roeder at the fact that his "truth" was cast before a few swine, see *Le Mensonge d'Auschwitz*.

38 P. Gibert, *La Bible à la naissance de l'histoire* (Paris: Fayard, 1979).

Sophists

and, therefore, of appearance—an appearance that borders on truth, that is its counterpart, its false and deceptive imitation. Between the Sophists and the object of their imitation, there is, he wrote, “the same sort of likeness that a wolf which is the wildest of animals, has to a dog, which is the most tame. But he who would be certain, ought to be very careful in this matter of comparisons, for they are very slippery things” (*Sophist* 231a). The entire dialogue of the *Sophist* is one long reflection on the near impossibility of distinguishing true from false, and on our obligation to banish lying and grant a certain form of existence to non-being. But he who knows the truth is also he who has the right to lie. In the *Republic*, Plato presents the theory of the good lie; in Book III of the *Laws*, there is an invented history of Athens in which the battle of Salamis, because it took place at sea with the sailors’ democracy, is omitted from the account of the second Medea war. In the prologue to the *Timaeus*, as also in the *Critias*, he achieves his masterpiece in this domain: inventing from whole cloth a continent that had disappeared—Atlantis, the adversary of an ancient, prehistoric, perfect Athens. This is a true account, insists Plato; in reality it is an emblematic falsehood, one that a philosopher-reader succeeds in decoding with no difficulty. But Plato’s assertions on the reality of Atlantis, after more than twenty-three centuries, still continue today to fool dupes and exploiters of dupes.

Of course speech of this sort becomes dangerous only when it is supported by governmental power and has acquired a monopoly statute. Plato did not make the laws of any Greek city, but it is true that from the time of Diocletian the late Roman Empire, both pagan and Christian, became, in its way, Platonist. But let’s leave the centuries to their unfolding. Today we are living in the “era of ideology.”³⁹ How could Auschwitz escape the conflict of interpretations, the ravenous ideological fury? But limits must be set to this permanent rewriting of history that characterizes ideological speech.

history
destiny

“The Zionists and the Poles are already presenting us with very divergent versions of Auschwitz,” writes Faurisson (Thion, p. 194). This is true. For the Israelis, or rather for their ideologists, Auschwitz was the ineluctable, logical outcome of life lived in the Diaspora, and all the victims of the death camps were destined to become Israeli citizens: a dual untruth. As for the Poles, it is not always easy to distinguish, in their written statements, what belongs under the heading of an obligatory truth—for instance, their deference toward the official decisions of the Soviet Commission of Inquiry just after the Liberation—and what is integrated, above all nationalistic, ideology. The Polish historian Danuta Czech has made the following rather surprising statement: “The purpose of KL Auschwitz was to put into practice the proposed biological extermination of whole peoples, mainly Slavs (especially Poles and the nations of the

39 See Claude Lefort, “L’Ere de l’idéologie,” *Encyclopaedia Universalis*, vol. 17 (Paris, 1973), pp. 75-96.

USSR), also Jews and people who were considered Jews in the light of the Nuremberg Act."⁴⁰ But of course neither the Poles nor the Israelis have profoundly transformed the reality of the massacre.

What happens with the writings of Butz, Faurisson, and the other ideological revisionists is of quite a different nature. It is the total lie, such as sects and political parties, including of course party-states, have produced in abundance. Although the *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union* that appeared under Stalin is a lasting monument of the most murderous historical lies, there also exist liberal, apparently scholarly versions of Stalinist history. *The Great Conspiracy Against Russia*, by M. Sayers and A. Kahn, was a model of its kind, by virtue of its numerous references and bibliographical notes. It also, when needed, used sources that were banned in the Soviet Union, such as *My Life*, by Leon Trotsky, but on behalf of an entirely Orthodox Russian history, with such gems as the following: "The death of Leon Trotsky left only one living candidate for a Napoleonic role in Russia: Adolf Hitler." In the immediate aftermath of the war, and the ruling Popular Fronts, I witnessed the effectiveness of such statements.

Arendt
on pol. + truth

In France, the Dreyfus case generated perhaps even more sophisticated feats on this order. In 1905 "Henri Dutrait-Crozon" (pseudonym of two members of the Ligue d'Action Française, Frédéric Delebecque and Colonel Georges Larpent) published a "revision" of the two first volumes of the history of the Dreyfus case by Joseph Reinach⁴¹ that, as a literary genre, seems to me to be the original model for present-day revisionism. All of their statements were not erroneous—far from it; it was simply that the whole was untrue, falsity itself (the purported "confessions" of Dreyfus, for instance) presented as truth. And yet this historical undertaking resulted in an authentically erudite volume of over eight hundred pages, with thousands of reference notes, and, for an entire current of French public opinion, albeit a minority, entrenched in its sectarian ideology, became the bible of the captain's guilt. And no importance was attached to the appearance of new documents such as Schwartzkoppen's *Notebooks*, which ridiculed this theory. On the contrary, they were soon digested and integrated with the rest: "But what does such evidence prove? This is something that few people have taken the trouble to investigate."⁴² And of course it was

NB

⁴⁰ *Selected Problems from the History of Auschwitz* (Oswiecim Museum, 1979), p. 49.

⁴¹ Joseph Reinach, *Historien: Révision de l'histoire de l'affaire Dreyfus*, ed. A. Savaète, preface by Charles Maurras (Paris, 1905).

⁴² H. Dutrait-Crozon, *Précis de l'Affaire Dreyfus avec un répertoire analytique* (Paris: Nouvelle Librairie Nationale, 1909); the third edition, published in Paris in 1938, contains an appendix on the subject of Schwartzkoppen, from which I quote. Regrettably, Philippe Ariès, in his fine autobiography, *Un Historien de dimanche* (Paris: Seuil, 1980), tells us nothing about the influences of the *Précis* on Action Française circles.

irrefutably demonstrated that for obvious material, moral, and intellectual reasons, the evidence could only be false.

Almond { The effects of assertions such as these may be seen all around us, and Thion's book, like others in the same vein, offers a particularly clever example of the genre. Thion opposes "historical truth" to "political truth"; historical truth being the result of honest inquiry, whereas political truth was forced upon us as early as 1942 by Zionist and Communist pressure groups. In reality, it is just the opposite of this reasoning that is true. Between 1942 and 1945, the Zionist lobby by no means had the power attributed to it. Thion, like many militants of Third World causes, has undoubtedly confronted, among his adversaries, representatives of the state of Israel. It is these confrontations that he has transposed into the past, transforming the "political truth" of today into the "historical truth" of yesterday.

A caricatured example of fanatical reasoning of this kind may be found in the writings of the Australian John Bennett, former secretary of the Victoria Council for Civil Liberties, whom Thion quite properly presents as one of the leaders of revisionism abroad.

John Bennett started his militant revisionist activities by opposing, quite legitimately, the hold that Zionist groups had acquired over the media, and particularly their efforts to have a local radio station shut down because it broadcast Palestinian-oriented programs. Leaving the present for the past, he became convinced, essentially after reading Arthur Butz's *Hoax*, that "Australians have been brainwashed into believing that six million Jews were killed by the Nazis, especially in gas chambers in Auschwitz." This lie should be exposed, he wrote, as should the support given Israel, consequences of which are politically and economically dangerous:

NS Uncritical support of Israel by the West has led to a sixfold increase in oil prices; it has alienated 800 million Moslems, and could lead to a world war. . . . Until the West can appraise Israel on its merits, unclouded by Zionist Holocaust propaganda, our economies will be threatened by further oil price rises and our very survival will be threatened by world war.

Quite evidently, here, "historical truth" is seen as the product of "political truth." But what is most extraordinary is that John Bennett, pursuing his argument in a long memorandum,⁴³ has introduced it by quoting from George

43 A short first version of Bennett's memorandum appeared in the Melbourne *National Times*, February 10, 1979. It is also published in Thion, pp. 161-62. I have at hand a complete typescript of the article as it was distributed by Bennett on April 12, 1979. The title, like that of Arthur Butz's book, is "The Hoax of the Twentieth Century."

Orwell

Orwell's famous formula: "Who controls the past controls the future. Who controls the present controls the past." A better condemnation of Bennett's own reasoning could not be found.⁴⁴

And yet, over and above all ideological aberrations, there remains the immensity of the crime, its technical dimensions conceived not like the Armenian massacres, by a government recognized as undeveloped, but, on the contrary, by a government ruling over a hypercultivated, hypercivilized nation. Incredible, isn't it? But nevertheless true.

In discussing witch-hunts and the criticism of them that arose in the seventeenth century, Lucien Febvre liked to quote this admirable precept of Cyrano de Bergerac: "We must not believe everything about a man, because a man can say everything. We must believe only what is human about him." And Febvre would comment: "Nobly said, if a bit belated; it dates from 1654. But it allows us to welcome—finally—the birth in France of a new sense . . . the sense of what is impossible."⁴⁵ What is human? What impossible? The question we must answer is: Do these words still have a meaning?

It is not easy to arrive at a conclusion. Although revisionist methods in general, and Faurisson's in particular, must be termed fraudulent—a justification of crime by its concealment—merely to prove their fraudulence is still far from explaining it. First, because no demonstration, however rigorous, will entirely convince everybody (there are still *anti-Dreyfusards*); and then, because we must try to discover the significance of this phenomenon and its explosion in France and elsewhere in late 1978 and 1979. To tell the truth, the only people who were genuinely surprised were the ones who had not understood the immense ballyhoo that accompanied the film *Holocaust*, which represented the final stage of the transformation of Auschwitz into merchandise. No one doubts that it is possible to do something different and better. I sincerely hope that Claude Lanzmann's film, now in production, will be equal to its immense subject.

But the question does not lie there. For whatever the circumstances, today we are witnessing the transformation of memory into history (e.g., the film by Alain Resnais and Jorge Semprun, *La guerre est fini.*) My generation, people of about fifty, is probably the last one for whom Hitler's crimes are still a memory.

44 The passages quoted are from a letter written by John Bennett that appeared in the *Melbourne Herald*, October 26, 1979, p. 19. See also *The Age*, March 15, 1979. From the standpoint of historical truth, a sharp reply to Bennett appeared in *The Age*, March 23, 1979, over the signature of a specialist, John Foster.

45 Closing formula of "*Sorcellerie, sottise ou révolution mentale*," *Annales ESC*, 1948, pp. 9-15. For further treatment of this theme see R. Mandrou, *Magistrats et sorciers en France au XVIIe siècle* (Paris: Plon, 1968).

That both disappearance and, worse still, depreciation of this memory must be combated seems to me obvious. Neither prescription nor pardon seems conceivable. It would be hard to imagine Dr. Mengele visiting the Auschwitz Museum, or presenting his card at the entrance of the Centre de Documentation Juive Contemporaine in Paris. But what are we going to do with this memory that, while it is our memory, is not that of everybody? Prosecution of the surviving criminals appears at once necessary and ludicrous. So many crimes have accumulated since! But there is really no common yardstick for measuring France's crimes in Algeria, America's in Southeast Asia, and the genocides of Armenians, Jews, Gypsies, Khmers, and the Tutsis of Rwanda. To take only the case of France: although Messieurs Lacoste, Papon, Massu, and Bigeard are insignificant criminals beside Eichmann, they are not "paper" criminals. The Israelis executed Eichmann, and they did well; but in our spectacle- and image-fed society, what can be done with a paper Eichmann?

It is hard for me to explain myself on this point. I was brought up with an elevated—some might say megalomaniacal—conception of the task of the historian, and it was during the war that my father made me read Chateaubriand's famous article in the *Mercure* of July 4, 1807:

In the silence of abjection, when the only sounds to be heard are the chains of the slave and the voice of the informer; when everything trembles before the tyrant and it is as dangerous to incur his favor as to deserve his disfavor, this is when the historian appears, charged with avenging the people.

I still believe in the need to remember and, in my way, I try to be a man of memory; but I no longer believe that historians are "charged with avenging the people." We must accept the fact that "the war is over," that the tragedy has become, in a way, secularized, even if this carries with it for us, I mean for we who are Jewish, the loss of a certain privilege of speech that has largely been ours since Europe discovered the great massacre. And this, in itself, is not a bad thing; for what can be more intolerable than the pose of certain personages draped in the sash of the Order of Extermination, who believe that in this way they can avoid the everyday pettiness and baseness that are the human lot?

Certain people have rallied to Faurisson's defense for reasons of principle. A petition that includes several hundred signatures, among the first those of Noam Chomsky and Alfred Lilienthal (Thion, p. 163), protests against the treatment that Faurisson has received. It implicitly describes his activities as authentic historical research: "Since 1974, he has been conducting extensive independent historical research into the Holocaust question," and continues by confirming what is not true, namely, that "frightened officials have tried to stop him from further research by denying him access to public libraries and archives." What is

scandalous about this petition is that it doesn't for one moment ask whether what Faurisson says is true or false; and it even describes his findings as though they were the result of serious historical research. Of course, it can be contended that everybody has the right to lie and "bear false witness," a right that is inseparable from the liberty of the individual and recognized, in the liberal tradition, as due the accused for his defense. But the right that a "false witness" may claim should not be granted him in the name of truth.

As for the "interdictions" of which Faurisson has been the victim, he has not been refused entry to any public library. The personnel of the Centre de Documentation Juive Contemporaine in Paris simply stated in early 1978 that they would no longer be at his service. This seems to me to be entirely normal. The CDJC is a private foundation. But can we do more? Neither illusion nor imposture, nor even falsehood, is foreign to the university and scientific world. Indeed, an extraordinary anthology could be made on the theme of Stalinist Soviet Russia as a place from which contradiction had disappeared in the writings of professional historians and geographers, certain of whom, in fact, were far from indifferent instructors.

There is something petty and mean about the way the Faurisson affair was handled both inside and outside the French university. For the Council of State to claim that he had published nothing—if it actually did this (Thion, p. 103)—seems to me to be disgraceful. Faurisson's published work is what it is (try to read Nerval in Faurisson's "translation"⁴⁶), but it does exist, and it belongs in the university canon. Nobody is obliged to speak to him.

Live with Faurisson? We all have to live with a certain number of hardly bearable people. Any other attitude would imply that we were imposing historical truth as legal truth—a dangerous attitude that could be applied in other circumstances. Each one of us can dream of a society in which the Faurissons of this world would be inconceivable, and we might even try to achieve such a society. But Faurissons exist in the same way that evil exists, around us and in us, and we may be grateful if, in the dreariness of our time, we can garner a few particles of truth, experience an occasional small satisfaction.

46 Faurisson, *La Clé des "Chimères" et "Autres Chimères" de Nerval* (Paris: Pauvert, 1976).

Translated by Maria Jolas. The translator wishes to acknowledge the kind assistance of Arno Mayer.